

A Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans [8]

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Chapter 8:1-11: Life in the Spirit [Part I]

From Slavery of Sin to Freedom in the Spirit: In chapter 8 Paul gives his answer to the problem of human condition of sin and death described in chapters 5-7. There was condemnation at the heart of the law and its working, a curse attached to those who break the law. A welcoming of the sinful humanity, a restorative process is inaugurated in Christ. The human self [old Adam/ego] acquires a new identity in the baptized, which is initiated by the endowing of the Spirit [Spirit is the agent of creation in the Bible]. Spirit's action, the dynamic power of God's love, makes the Christian an adopted child of God, a new creation. Paul cites 'Spirit' 19 times in chapter 8. Paul's use of Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ, became one of the foundations of the development of the doctrine of Trinity.

Despair of Sin and Joy in Christ: Son of God came to live the human condition. The purpose of the law was to make humans righteous but failed; 'all have sinned'! With the law, it was either or: you obey the law, you are righteous and disobey the law means condemnation and death. Son of God was sent to accomplish what the law could not do. Right relationship with God is now revealed in Christ. Proof of Christ's righteousness is his death and resurrection. The Spirit led Christ to his death and resurrection and a Christian goes through the same process, led by the Spirit, to die to sin and rise to live in Christ, in the Spirit [in John 1:36, Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world; he ended human subjugation to sin, dealt with it on the cross]. Prior to sending of the Son, God gave the law, sent prophets to reveal his will for humankind. The Christ-event was God's definitive action, Son of God in human flesh [human nature], for the redemption of the world.

Sending of the Son of God: Paul says that the Son came in the 'likeness of flesh'. 'Likeness' doesn't mean appearance. Christ was real human being; however, his human nature had the appearance/likeness of Adam [human] who sinned or human nature that is prone to sin. As new Adam and redeemer, sin had no power over Christ and could not reside in him! Hebrew 4:15 says Christ knew no sin but experienced the effects of human sin, suffering and death, which is understood as Son came in the 'likeness of flesh'. In Galatians 3:13, Paul says that Christ made himself sin, a curse, which is emptying himself to the level of sinful humanity, to take away sin! In himself Christ liberated sin-conditioned human nature [human unrighteousness] through his obedience unto death. Christ's death was God's judgment on sin or God condemned sin in the humanity of Christ, not as punishing Christ but as putting an end to death passed on by sin.

Operation of the Law and Function of the Spirit: Paul explained elaborately that the law could not absolve sins. Paul is not condemning the law but the focus is on the Law's powerlessness to give life; weakness of the flesh is the culprit. God's purpose in the law is now fulfilled in Christ. A new order of existence has taken place for the Christian in relation to Christ. In Christ, sin/death lost its claim. In Christ's death Christian has put to death deeds of the body or living a life that is dead and a life that is alive. This new order of existence is no longer under the dominion

of the flesh/sin but a life in the Spirit, acquiring the freedom to choose things of the Spirit [Galatians 5:22-23]. The presence of sin is still in the 'I' as divided self [chapter 7] but the Spirit is God's mercy/forgiveness offered to the sinner. In Christ, the preoccupation is not with the law but life in the Spirit. Spirit of Christ dwelling in us is the reason for our new identity as adopted children of God; the Abba [Father] of Jesus Christ becomes our Abba [Father]. In Paul's thought, there is the 'already and not yet' reality of our existence. The individual believer has to go through natural death, not as punishment for sin, but as resurrection of the body [human existence] that is the dwelling place of the Spirit. Spirit dwelling in us is our experience of freedom to choose love and life.

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